



Published in final edited form as:

Epilepsy Behav. 2015 March ; 44: 238. doi:10.1016/j.yebeh.2014.12.045.

Epilepsy Foundation public awareness campaigns — 2001 through 2013

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The Epilepsy Foundation (EF) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have worked together to carry out multidimensional public education and awareness campaigns for nearly 15 years. While the partnership predates the 2012 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report *Epilepsy Across the Spectrum: Promoting Health and Understanding* [1], our work together responds to the report's recommendations emphasizing (1) that many health professionals still need education about epilepsy, (2) that education efforts for people with epilepsy and their families should be thorough and incorporate health literacy and cultural considerations, and (3) that the stigma of epilepsy must be eliminated. In this issue, we present an article that describes public health campaigns on epilepsy over the years. The campaigns have been tailored to youth, young adults, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians with and without epilepsy. Key campaign messages were initially communicated via traditional mass media channels (print advertisements, radio) and later via electronic media, the Internet, and a full array of social media. Though the article focuses on almost 15 years of public awareness campaigns ending in 2013, activities continue into the present to remain vigilant in supporting and reinforcing public awareness about epilepsy. For example, in late 2013, a campaign addressing first aid in epilepsy was launched through the use of Facebook and Twitter that reached more than 650,000 people nationwide. Public personalities, celebrities, and trusted medical professionals have participated in increasing understanding and promoting greater acceptance of epilepsy by serving as spokespersons and supporters for those with the disorder. Further, EF partnerships with regional EF affiliates, corporations, professional organizations, and academic institutions also promote the mission. Continued collaboration between the CDC and the EF will allow for additional social media campaigns as well as other innovations in outreach. This collaboration is part

Conflict of interests

The author has no conflicts of interest.

of a broader synergistic effort to mobilize national, state, and community partnerships to improve the social environment and health outcomes for people with epilepsy.

The accompanying article focuses on accomplishments achieved during and immediately following these campaigns. It also underlines the need for new research to explore multilevel predictors of stigma (e.g., per capita expenditures on epilepsy awareness campaigns) and new methods and approaches to combat stigma. Data collection throughout the duration of future campaigns is needed to help determine their efficacy in influencing outcomes such as sustained changes in the public's knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about epilepsy, increased social participation, and, ultimately, improved health and psychosocial outcomes.

We are confident that sustained and expanded partnerships between the EF and the CDC will contribute to improved self-management and improved health and quality of life and reduce stigma for persons with epilepsy.

References

1. Institute of Medicine. Epilepsy across the spectrum: promoting health and understanding. Washington, DC: The National Academy Press; 2012. [Available at <http://www.iom.edu/epilepsy>]